

Ray Blames His Solitary On Appeals

By ALBERT GORE JR.

James Earl Ray charged yesterday that Tennessee prison officials told him he will be kept in solitary confinement until he abandons efforts to obtain a new trial.

In the first interview he has ever permitted with newsmen, the confessed murderer of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said his life in the maximum security unit of Tennessee's main prison is "kind of a cave-dweller's existence."

HE QUOTED prison officials as telling him privately, "If you just stop your appeals, we'll treat you like everybody else."

Ray was sentenced to 99 years for King's murder in a Memphis trial in which the presiding judge cut off an attempt by Ray to explain why he did not agree with those who said there was no conspiracy surrounding the murder.

Last month, U.S. Dist. Court Judge L. Clure Morton dismissed a bid for a new trial on the grounds that Ray had intelligently and voluntarily pleaded guilty in the Memphis trial. Ray has charged that his guilty plea was coerced by his attorneys at

(Turn to Page 3, Column 2)



—Staff photo by Robert Jonsson

Rare Appearance

Convicted murderer James Earl Ray is escorted by Assr. Deputy Warden James Vandever from his maximum security cell at the Tennessee State Penitentiary to a conference with newsmen.

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(Continued From Page One)

that time, including Percy Foreman of Houston.

HIS NEW attorneys, Bernard Fensterwald Jr. and James H. Lesar, said yesterday they are appealing Morton's ruling and that they have filed a "show-cause" order designed to gain Ray more freedom within the prison.

Ray was asked yesterday why he believes that prison officials are trying to coerce him to abandon his appeals.

Q. Are they trying to keep you quiet?

A. Well, I imagine if I did happen to get a trial or something, it would be kind of an embarrassment — especially if I got acquitted.

Q. To who.

A. I suppose (to) the politicians.

Q. Why would it be an embarrassment?

A. Usually, the prosecutor don't want to lose a case . . . Maybe his hypothesis (that Ray acted alone) might be proven a little incorrect or something like that.

The interview was arranged by WLAC-TV newsmen Jim Gilchrist. Gilchrist and the two reporters who joined in the interview yesterday agreed

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A. Well, yeah, there's a difference—a different color.

Q. What, besides that?

A. Well . . . I'm not an expert on the black problem. I talk to 'em; associate with 'em, but I'm not what you'd call a professional humanitarian.

—James Earl Ray

to guidelines established by Ray's attorneys prohibiting questions about the crime or the trial.

When questions touched on those areas, Ray's attorneys signaled him to avoid answering. For that reason, he did not elaborate on his own version of what happened the day Martin Luther King was shot to death on the balcony of a Memphis motel.

HOWEVER, Ray's attorneys did permit him to answer questions about his feelings toward Negroes.

His feelings have never firmly been established by investigators in the case, but they are considered significant because "racism" is often given as Ray's motives for killing the civil rights leader.

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At another point in the interview, Ray said he was not afraid for his life in prison because black inmates, as well as white inmates, "know what's going on . . . They read in the papers about the case—what went on behind

the scenes and all that stuff . . . The blacks, they're like the whites . . . long as he ain't a stool pigeon or something like that, why, I can get along with him all right."

Warden Jim Rose said Ray's charge that he was kept in solitary confinement in order to pressure him to drop appeals was nonsense.

ACCORDING to Rose, Ray is kept in the maximum security unit because he is considered an extreme security risk in light of two escape attempts from Brushy Mountain Prison and successful escapes from a prison in Missouri.

Rose also said the reason Ray is not permitted to exercise with other inmates of the maximum security unit is that prison officials are being extra careful that no harm comes to Ray—particularly in light of numerous cases of violence inside the prison since Ray and other inmates of the Tennessee maximum security prison at Petros (now closed) were transferred to Nashville last July.

Ray said he has been permitted to exercise only about once every three weeks and is permitted to shower only once every five days. In

addition, he said, prison authorities do not permit him to use salt and pepper with his food and deny him Vitamin C because they will not allow him to buy fruit at the commissary.

HE APPEARED haggard and unshaven at the news conference yesterday. Afterwards, however, Rose said that Ray turned down his last opportunity to shave—on Tuesday. The warden said Ray is permitted to shower and shave three times a week, but acknowledged that exercise periods have been infrequent in recent weeks. He said the reason is the deluge of rain this year.

Ray's food according to Rose, is the same as that provided all of the other inmates in the maximum security unit.

Asked if there were any other complaints, Ray said, "Well, it's just a lot of petty things. You don't get no kind of dessert or nothing like that."

ALTHOUGH prison officials are under a court order to provide Ray with daily exercise and work, they claim

that he refused the kind of work program that they designed for him and hence will not be allowed out of his cell. "I think I'll get out of here sooner or later," said Ray just before going back to the maximum security unit.